

BARISTA

Who You Are Matters: Combating Trafficking Every Day

Lauren is a barista at the local coffee shop. Lauren's commute to work is often uneventful, but she keeps her eyes open for any suspicious activity that she may need to report. Because she drives the route regularly she will likely notice if something is out of the ordinary, especially because there are generally few people on the roadways when she drives in for the opening shift.

Lauren and other café employees received a training by the local anti-trafficking Task Force about how traffickers often spend time at places potential victims might frequent, including coffee shops. She also learned that traffickers groom victims by taking them shopping, so they may be found spending time in the café. Lauren was trained on what to look for, and the reporting protocols for suspicious activity. Her coffee shop partnered with the Task Force to create a plan for what to do if trafficking is suspected.

During her shift, Lauren is able to observe who is in the shop and can identify youth who exhibit many of the warning signs of human trafficking or exploitation, including regularly missing school, frequently running away or being homeless, having a "boyfriend" or a "girlfriend" who is noticeably older, or showing signs of physical abuse.

Lauren has built great relationships with many of her regular customers. As she chats with them, she is able to learn about their skills, resources and talents. She often shares with her customers the needs that the local service providers share at the anti-trafficking Task Force meetings and how the customers can use their skills to meet those needs.

Her employer has worked with the Task Force to post signs with the National Human Trafficking Hotline number on the bulletin board and in the restrooms. The Task Force also keeps the board updated with information about the open meetings that the Task Force holds.

Lauren is also passionate about preventing human trafficking from occurring in the first place. When she learned that efforts to serve vulnerable populations were essential to the fight, she arranged for her coffee shop to help. Now, the coffee shop donates 10% of the profits from their monthly open mic nights and fair trade coffee sales to organizations serving youth at risk in their community.

As Lauren is finishing her shift, she reminds her coworker that any pastries left at closing are supposed to be boxed up for the local Aftercare home that sends a designated volunteer to pick them up.

As Lauren leaves for the day, she is reminded that even though she did not work directly with survivors, rescue anyone, or change legislation, she was able to make a difference. Though Lauren's part in fighting human trafficking may not be on the front lines, she is still engaging in a meaningful and essential way.

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Recent reports state that more than 60% of Americans purchase coffee outside their homes on a regular basis. Coffee shops are located in every community in the US and have customers of every demographic. Further, employees are immersed in their local communities socially and geographically in a unique way. Baristas can be trained not only to identify human trafficking, but also to mobilize communities around combatting trafficking and protecting vulnerable populations.

As a professional, you can make a big difference with simple additions to what you are already doing every day! Consider the following:

- Learn the signs of sex and labor trafficking. Know what to look for to identify human trafficking of women, men, girls, and boys.
- Program the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-373-7888) into your mobile device, post free flyers with the contact information on bulletin boards and in restrooms, and include a link to www.humantraffickinghotline.org on your social media pages so that you and your customers can quickly report suspicious activity or get help.
- Ask local service providers (Human Trafficking Aftercare programs, Domestic Violence Shelters, Youth Shelters, Foster Care/Group Homes) what their needs are, and determine if your store, employees, or customers could meet those needs.
- Build relationships with customers. Notice when youth are not acting like themselves and encourage adults to use their talents and skills to serve those vulnerable populations.
- Donate unused items to Aftercare residential homes and non-residential programs for survivors of human trafficking.
- Designate a percentage of profits from a sale or event to be donated to local service providers and organizations serving vulnerable youth.
- Allow customers to purchase gift cards to be donated to survivors, and then distribute them to local service providers.
- Consider offering apprentice programs to survivors.

When we engage together, miracles happen. Eradicating human trafficking will not be an easy task, but the steps to engaging the fight are simple. For more information about combating human trafficking and protecting vulnerable populations as a business, individual, or organization, visit www.engagetogether.com.